

# Too-Tall Twyla

by Russell Lewis



Shawn and Terry caught the flu, Roland broke his leg, and Jared moved away. Suddenly our Midcity boys' basketball team was down to five players and zero substitutes.

Coach Allens talked to us after school. "League rules require at least one player on the bench. We have two choices. One, we can forfeit the championship game with Central this Friday."

"Forfeit? No way!" I exclaimed. "They only beat us by two points last year. This is our year to win!"

"Can't we just suit up some kid - any kid?" Mark asked.

Mark was our superstar, the reason we knew this was our year to finally beat Central. He never missed when he had an open shot. He was the league's best shot blocker and rebounder, too. The only time our subs got on the court was when Coach wanted to give Mark a breather!

Well, league rules or not, Coach wasn't about to suit up just any kid. "What if one of our players gets hurt?" he asked. "That sub would have to go into the game, right?"

We all nodded.

"So we need the best player we can get, right?"

We all nodded again.

"So choice number two is..." Coach paused. "The league office said Twyla could play for us."

"Too-Tall Twyla?" everyone exclaimed.

Twyla was my big sister. She was also captain of our girls' basketball team. Twyla had loved to play basketball ever since fourth grade, when she suddenly shot up six inches taller than any boy in the class. That's when she got the nickname "Too-Tall".

She was a pretty good player, too. So when we thought about our choices - either forfeit the game or let Twyla sit on the bench - we didn't hesitate. We became the first coed basketball team in Midcity's history!

We had one more practice before the big game. Coach had us practice our fast breaks, passing the ball back and forth as we raced down the court.

"Hey, Sis," I yelled. "Don't try to shoot every time you get the ball. Pass the ball to me!"

"But I was open," Twyla yelled back. "Didn't Coach say to shoot if you had an open shot?" Her shot had just swished through the hoop, touching nothing but net.

"Yeah, but he also said to pass the ball around, be a team player!" I was kind of embarrassed. My shot had just bounced off the rim, missing badly. Oh well, I thought. It'll be Mark, not Twyla, in the real game.

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**LA.A.2.2.2 Author's Purpose Form B**

The real game for the league championship was tomorrow against Central. This was going to be our year, we thought - especially with Mark playing as well as he was.

On Friday the whole school was buzzing. At lunchtime the cheerleaders did their routines in the cafeteria. They made each of us players stand up as we were introduced. When Mark's name was called, the whole place went bonkers. Mark was our superstar, and all the kids knew it! After school everyone crowded into the gymnasium. When we ran onto the court to begin our warm-up drills, the cheerleaders jumped up and down, waving their pompoms. My heart began pumping like a jackhammer, my mouth felt as if it were stuffed with cotton, and my knees were shaking so hard I thought they would buckle.

After we ran through a few drills, I began to feel a little more normal. Then the warning buzzer sounded, and Coach called us over for a meeting.

"Remember what you've learned," he said as we huddled around him. "Teamwork - passing - look for the open player. If they double-team Mark, that means someone else is open."

We broke out of the huddle with a shout. I was still nervous. It was a good feeling, though, being all pumped up for the game. I knew that this year we were going to win!

We jumped off to an early six-point lead, then held our own until half-time. Mark shot 80 percent from the floor and had five rebounds. No one on Central's team could even come close to matching up with him.

They must have talked it over during halftime. When the second half started, they had two players guarding Mark. That stopped us for a little while, but not for long.

"Look for the open player!" someone yelled from our bench. It was Twyla. She was standing on the sidelines screaming at us as we raced down the court. "You can do it!" she yelled. "Yea, Midcity! Yea, team!"

I had to admit she was right. Every time they put two defenders on Mark, one of us was always left open. But our shooting wasn't as accurate as Mark's. Central slowly crept back to within one basket of tying the game.

Then disaster struck. Cutting between two Central players, Mark tripped and fell. The referees stopped play when they saw him rolling on the floor in pain, holding his left ankle.

"It's a bad sprain," Coach announced. "Mark's out for the rest of the game." His face was grim as he turned to Twyla. "Report to the scoring table, Twyla. You're going in for Mark."

Twyla looked scared. She looked at Coach with a frozen expression on her face.

I knew just how she felt. I remembered my jackhammer heart, my cottony mouth, and my shaking knees. "You'll do O.K., Twyla," I said. "Just remember what Coach says. Look for the open man...er, uh, person!"

Everyone laughed at that. Even Twyla. Then the buzzer sounded, and we took our places on the floor again. "Look what we've got!" shouted the Central players. "The Midcity *girls'* team!" They cracked up laughing. They thought the game was all wrapped up now.

That's the way it looked to me, too. Twyla was scared stiff and not playing well. It was as if we only had four players instead of five. The Central team didn't even bother guarding her. They put the extra player on whichever one of us had the ball.

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With three minutes to go, the score was tied. Soon we were down by one basket, then by two. By the time Central pulled into a ten-point lead, we began to play as if we had just about given up.

Even when Sis blocked a shot, we didn't really pay much attention. After all, her nickname wasn't "Too-Tall" for nothing! But the next time she blocked a shot, she rebounded the ball herself, dribbled the length of the floor, and sank an easy lay-up.

*That* got everyone's attention. It jarred Twyla out of her frozen state, too. She blocked shot after shot, rebounded at both ends of the court, and passed the ball to the open player on our fast breaks. She swished nearly every one of her own shots.

The Central team was stunned and confused. They weren't laughing now. Then, with the score tied and only seconds left on the clock, Twyla blocked another Central shot. Expecting another fast break, I started to run up the floor.

"Double-team her!" someone on their team shouted. Two Central players trapped Twyla in the corner.

Twisting her head left and right, she spotted me in the lane, wide open. With a quick head fake, Twyla drew one of the Central players out of position, then pushed a two-handed pass to me under his outstretched arms.

I took the pass, made an easy lay-up as the buzzer sounded - and it was all over.

Final score - Midcity 48, Central 46. We had won! We were the new league champions!

We hugged and laughed and slapped high fives. Mark had a big grin on his face. So did Coach. Everyone was slapping Twyla on the back. She was grinning, too.

"We're a girl's team, all right," Mark said, "and her name is Twyla! But 'Too-Tall' isn't the right nickname for our MVP."

I laughed. "I know her nickname. It's what Central's probably calling her right now - 'Too-Much' Twyla!"

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**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Read the passage “Too-Tall Twyla”, then circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. When the author writes, “My heart began pumping like a jackhammer, my mouth felt as if it were stuffed with cotton, and my knees were shaking so hard I thought they would buckle”, he is trying to show that the basketball player
  - A. exercised too hard during the drill.
  - B. is feeling very nervous.
  - C. is too ill to play in the big game.
  - D. is not physically fit.
  
2. With which statement would the author of “Too-Tall Twyla” MOST likely agree?
  - A. It would have been better for the team to forfeit the game.
  - B. Girls should only play on the girls’ team.
  - C. Twyla was not a team player.
  - D. Allowing Twyla to play was a good choice.
  
3. The author wants the reader to think that Twyla
  - A. should shoot every time she gets the ball.
  - B. can play as well as the boys.
  - C. is too tall to play basketball.
  - D. should stay on the bench.
  
4. Why did the author write “Too-Tall Twyla”?
  - A. to make readers understand the rules of basketball
  - B. to entertain readers with a story about a basketball game
  - C. to explain what happens when disaster strikes a team
  - D. to encourage readers to root for the Midcity team
  
5. The author describes Mark’s scoring abilities in detail
  - A. to show how important Mark is to the team.
  - B. to prove that every team needs a superstar.
  - C. to explain why the other teams double-team Mark.
  - D. to convince readers that the team cannot win without Mark.

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**Answer Key – Too-Tall Twyla**

LA.A.2.2.2: The student identifies the author's purpose as stated or implied in text (including recognizing when a text is intended primarily to persuade). The student also identifies ways an author's perspective influences text.

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